DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 973 EC 304 327

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TITLE Responsible Inclusion of Students with Disabilities.
PUB DATE May 95
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Study Conference on Cued Speech in Malay (Perpustakaan Negara, Malaysia, May 25-27, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Educational Legislation; *Educational Methods; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Social Integration; *Student Placement
IDENTIFIERS Education for All Handicapped Children Act

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the premise that children with mental and/or physical disabilities should be included in regular education programs whenever possible. Instructional strategies for successful inclusion are discussed and the need for parental and community involvement emphasized. The paper reviews the theory of inclusion; features of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act; principles for implementing classroom inclusion; and special teaching systems (precise teaching, cooperative learning, individual tutoring, social skills training, strategic intervention, teacher assistance teams, and the McGill Action Planning System. The importance of parent involvement to success in inclusion is stressed and several ways of involving parents are suggested. Finally, the value of inclusive programs for all children, not just those with disabilities, is affirmed. (DB)

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Responsible Inclusion Of Students With Disabilities

by

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RESPONSIBLE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

DR. MERILEE ROSBERG

The author explores the premise that children with mental and/or physical disabilities should be included in regular educational programs whenever possible. Instructional strategies for succesful inclusion are discussed and the need for parental and community involvement is explored.

The author believes that inclusion can meet the needs of all students if done in a responsible way with appropriate support for the classroom teacher.

RESPONSIBLE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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"Segregated settings do not prepare students to live in an integrated society. Responsible inclusion does. Conversely, responsible inclusion does not leave students in regular programs and classes without the necessary support systems to meet their needs" (Lombardi, 1994, p.13).

For the past forty years or so in the United States, children who have special needs have been placed in segregated schools or classrooms. Some educators are calling for the abolition of all segregated placements even for students with severe handicaps (Heward and Orlansky, 1992). When children attend segregated schools they do not learn to function in a normal, integrated environment. Their peers do not get to know and understand them. As adults, they end up being isolated in sheltered workshops or institutions.

Wolfendale (1990) believes that we need an alignment between 'best' practice in primary school and in special education. Important human needs are common to all and are more significant than differences associated with handicaps. All children are special and we need to strive to meet their individual needs. This should be a collective responsibility. All teachers and staff in the school should be responsible for meeting the needs of the children in their building. They must work together and also include parents and community members to provide an appropriate education for all children.

THE EDUCATION FOR ALL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ACT

In the United States in 1975 Public Law 94-142 was passed. This was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. It included nine types of handicapping conditions such as blindness, deafness, physically handicapped, educable or trainable mentally retarded, and emotionally disturbed. The law has six main provisions. (1)Identification of all handicapped children, age 4-21. (2)Assessment of their educational needs. (3)Individualized program planning. (4)Procedural (due process) safeguards for students and their parents. (5)Education in the least restrictive alternative that meets the child's needs. (6)Nondiscrimination.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CLASSROOM INCLUSION

If children are identified with a particular problem, they need to be assessed and treated. This means that teachers need to be aware of different types of instruction in order to make decisions as to the most appropriate strategies to use with each child. Teachers must be willing to work with consultants and special education teachers to benefit the pupils. They must become more responsible to the needs of all children.

Exceptional children go through the same stages in a manner similar to regular children, yet at a slower rate. As with all children, they need a rich, stimulating environment. Educational tasks should be (1)carefully explained, (2)relatively brief, (3)monitored quickly, (4)systematically varied, and (5)should involve learning through multiple senses (Sprinthall and Sprinthall 1987.)

For about 90% of the time teachers can use the same practices that are effective with all children. About 10% of the time teachers of exceptional children may need to employ new or different methods. Some different methods that might be used for children with special needs are positive reinforcement strategies and behavior modification techniques. At times these strategies can be useful for all children in the class but children with special needs, such as learning disabilities, may need more positive reinforcement to keep them from becoming discouraged.

SPECIAL TEACHING SYSTEMS

Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1987) discuss several different teaching systems that can be utilized with children who have special needs. One system, precise teaching, is a structured step by step program. First a specific task is identified. The task should be manageable such as learning to count to ten or to recognize and read five sight words. In some cases, the task may need to be broken down into smaller components. Then the teacher and the student set up a contract. The teacher should help the student to develop a chart to keep track of progress. Finally, they negotiate an award such as extra time to do something the child likes. This should not be done with all learning tasks, but it can provide motivation to get a child started. Once a child begins to make progress, satisfaction becomes its own reward.

Cooperative learning is another effective teaching strategy. In this situation grouping is heterogeneous. Regular and special

education students work together. The students are divided into groups of four or five. The teacher gives each group an assignment with material to learn. The students engage in discussion and quiz each other on the material. The children are tested at the end of the week and scores within each group are averaged with extra points given to groups for "improving" students. This reduces destructive competition and students work together to succeed.

Individual tutoring is a very effective instructional tool in teaching (Slavin, 1983). Aides, community volunteers, and students are trained to work with children who need extra help. If done appropriately tutoring will promote learning more effectively than any other technique. Trained older students can be very effective tutors and if they are only involved one to three hours a week, it will not adversely affect the tutor. In fact the tutor student may actually improve academically and socially with this added responsibility.

Social skills training can be very helpful for the handicapped child. Exceptional children sometimes lag behind in social abilities and are left out and ignored. Counselors and teachers can help children to gain skills through techniques such as role playing. Once children are accepted socially, it is also easier for them to grow academically. A positive self-concept is related to academic and social success.

A new program that is discussed by Lombardi (1994) is the Strategy Intervention Model,(SIM). In this approach students are

taught how to learn, not what to learn. Strategies that are part of this curriculum include: word imagery, self-questioning, paraphrasing, assignment completion, and test taking. The special education and regular classroom teacher work together to teach students these skills. Most of these strategies can be effective with all students not just those who are handicapped.

Another approach that is being used effectively in many schools in the United States is the Teacher Assistance Team(TAT). This usually consists of three or four faculty members who meet to help the other teachers and staff solve problems. This is a collaborative arrangement where any teacher with a problem can seek the help of the team. The team works with the teacher to look for solutions to academic or student behavior problems.

Earlier in this paper, I referred to the need to involve parents and other community members. One program that does this is the McGill Action Planning System(MAPS). This system includes several assumptions. It assumes that (1)all people are valuable, (2)all people have abilities, (3)all people can learn, (4)disability is a social construct, (5)there is a real need for support and services, (6)the only label should be the persons name (Heward and Orlansky, 1992). The key ingredients for participants are intimate and personal contact with the person being mapped. Mapping is a collaborative problem solving process involving persons who are close to participants such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and friends. The person to be mapped is usually present also. The session is led by a facilitator and

there is a recorder to note the plan of action. Questions to be discussed include (1)What is a MAP? (2)What is the individual's history? (3)What is your dream for the individual? This should not be limited by money or current realities. (4)What is your nightmare? (5)Who is the individual? (6)What are the person's strengths, abilities, and talents? (7)What are the individual's needs? (8)What is the plan of action? MAPS is a problem solving process. It is both talk and action.

All of the above are systems and strategies to consider using in a classroom with individuals who are mainstreamed. Teachers and consultants need to make decisions to decide what program is best for the children. In some cases it may be a combination of systems and strategies. Whatever program is chosen needs to be periodically evaluated to determine its success with the individual(s) involved.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents need to be involved if any program for children with exceptional needs is to be truly effective. Some parents will be extremely active in their child's educational program while others may be only minimally involved, but all parents should have opportunities to have input. Shea and Bauer (1991) discuss a "continuum of collaboration." (1) The first level involves written and telephone communications between the school and the parents. (2) The next level is parent-teacher conferences. (3) The third level includes group meetings and activities. (4) At the fourth level, there is more intense collaboration as parents

participate in the classroom, school, and community activities.

Most parents are involved in levels one and two. What about the other two levels? Teachers can provide group activities and encourage parents to become involved in school activities.

Parents and teachers who work with children with special needs usually meet together in group settings for three basic reasons. (1) To transfer information. (2) To teach and learn instructional, management, or interpersonal communication techniques. (3) To give and receive social-emotional support. At different times one element will be more heavily emphasized than another but they are all important in developing a support system that will benefit the child (Shea and Bauer, 1991).

Classroom and school involvement may not be possible or feasible for all parents, but parents who are willing can be trained to be effective paraprofessionals. Parents can be trained in behavior management and instructional skills. This will enable them to be more effective with their own children as well as to aid in the classroom. Parent volunteers can relieve the teacher of many routine tasks and free the teacher to supervise instruction and to work with small groups.

The amount of involvement by parents in their child's educational programme will vary, but all parents can be helpful by providing important information to teachers regarding their child's abilities and interests. Parents can also let teachers know their goals and aspirations for their child. In the long run, parental involvement can be highly beneficial to the child.

CONCLUSION

Students with special needs deserve the best, most appropriate education that schools can provide. At times this should mean that the child with handicaps is placed in a regular education class with supportive services. This does not mean that special education is abolished but that special educators work together with the regular classroom teacher. Proper support is essential if inclusion is to succeed. This may mean that a part-time or full-time instructional aide is necessary in some classes. Teachers also need support of consultants and the knowledge that there is somewhere to turn when they have difficulties. They need to believe that they can work with students with disabilities and be successful.

Virginia Roash, director of the Center on Teaching and Learning in Alexandria, Virginia (1993) believes that including children with special needs can benefit all children. Appropriate inclusive programs do not disrupt regular education and several schools have documented advantages for all students. Parents, teachers, and principals feel that there are social benefits for all children and students with handicaps do as well or better academically when they are not pulled our for special help. When teachers adapt instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities, they become more aware of the needs of their other students and tend to better meet the needs of all students. With proper supports and services, inclusion can be successful.

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